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AUTHOR	Bierema, Laura L.; Tisdell, Elizabeth; Johnson-Bailey, Juanita; Gedro, Julie
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ABSTRACT

The human resource development (HRD) profession needs to continue to develop its core theories and to integrate new theories into the body of knowledge. Creating new knowledge is of essential importance to both HRD practitioners and researchers. As an emerging field, HRD is in the process of defining itself as a discipline. Currently, there are voices missing from the emerging discourse; one of these is that of feminism. These are four reasons that voice should be included: both HRD and feminism are concerned with the construction of knowledge; the priorities and practice of HRD are the exclusive purview of white men; in defining itself as a profession, HRD must be as broad-based as possible; and promoting meaningful change in the lives of organizations and the individuals in them is a strongly held value of both HRD and feminism. Among the challenges facing HRD in incorporating feminist research is that while human resource workers are usually women, managers are usually men. Human resource practices sometimes function to perpetuate patriarchal systems of power. As the field of HRD expands its theoretical base, a broader less sexist approach can only better reflect the diverse clientele with whom human resource staff work. (The bibliography contains 27 references). (AJ)

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Integrating Feminist Research And Practice In The Field Of HRD

Laura L. Bierema
University of Georgia

Elizabeth Tisdell
National Louis University

Juanita Johnson-Bailey
University of Georgia

Julie Gedro
BellSouth Telecommunications, Inc.

This paper introduces frameworks for feminist research and practice in HRD with the goal of strengthening women's voices both in academia and practice. This paper defines feminism, describes feminist research, proposes strategies for feminist HRD research, and addresses the contradictions and challenges related to women in HRD.

Keywords: Women, Feminism, Feminist HRD

Human Resource Development is a rising discipline that is in the process of creating and validating knowledge. Little has been written about HRD research itself (Hixon and McClernon, 1999; Jacobs, 1990; Sleezer and Sleezer, 1997, 1998), and as a discipline, HRD has not especially concerned itself with issues of diversity, equality, power, heterosexism, discrimination, sexism, racism, or other issues of oppression in organizations. Bierema and Cseh (2002) analyzed over 600 AHRD Proceedings papers from 1996-2000 according to a feminist research framework and found that few studies recognize gender as a category of analysis. Based on their findings, they conclude that HRD research is paying insufficient attention to women's experience, asymmetrical power arrangements in organizations, and problems of racism and sexism. They also found that the field poorly advocates social justice and change to remedy structural inequality. Yet, oppression in organizations mirrors the same problems in society and deserves HRD's attention. HRD is not alone in its oversight of women. Governmental policies, business practices, and research agendas in many fields lag behind the pace of workplace diversification.

Creating new knowledge is of essential importance to both HRD practitioners and researchers. As an emerging field, HRD is in the process of defining itself as a discipline. Yet, voices are absent from the discourse, and there has been little critical assessment of the field. Now is the time to question the theoretical frameworks and practices defining the field before they become entrenched and simply serve to reinforce the patriarchal status quo. Contemporary HRD research and practice concentrates on corporate American, skews loyalties toward management, and reveres performance improvement above other results. HRD researchers must explore the assumptions underlying their research, consider the beneficiaries of research, reflect on areas yet unexplored, and question the value of HRD research according to its impact on theory, practice, organizations, communities, and employees. This paper endeavors to begin exploring these assumptions. This purpose of this paper is to make the case for feminist research in HRD, define feminism, describe feminist research, identify strategies for feminist research in HRD, and address the contradictions and challenges related to women in HRD

The Case for Feminist Research in HRD

Why should HRD be concerned with feminist issues? There are least four key reasons. First, HRD regards learning as a foundational philosophical, theoretical and practical component, and feminism and feminist research are concerned with the construction of knowledge. Second, upon careful examination of the priorities of HRD research and practice, it is clear and startling that many voices are missing from the discourse of knowledge creation in our field. In other words, the determination of research agendas, control of associations, editing of journals, direction of academic programs, and leadership in organizations tends to be in the hands of white males. Third, the field of HRD is in the process of defining itself and must entertain a wider range of critical perspectives than traditional theories of

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learning, performance and change. Finally, HRD should be concerned with feminism since promoting meaningful change and making a difference in the lives of individuals, organizations and communities is a strongly held value of both HRD and feminism. Feminist research and practice offer remedies and strategies to advance, improve and revise the field of HRD.

Feminism

Liberal feminism (Tong,1998) or generic feminism, posits that if women are given access and opportunity, then the hegemonic structures that have relegated women to second-class status will disappear. Emboldened by this perspective, twentieth century women fought to get the vote in the 1920s, procured legislation in the 1970s that produced Titles VII and IX and the Equal Pay Act, and flooded into the labor market and into professional schools in the 1970s and 1980s. While the landscape has improved in many ways, women currently earn only 71 cents for every $1 men earn. Women are neither proportionately represented in the *Fortune 500*, nor on the local, state, or federal levels of government. Is the Liberal Feminist mantra of "Access and Opportunity" outdated? Do the more revolutionary feminist perspectives (e.g. radical, post modernism, and global feminism) have suggestions for moving beyond legislation and affirmative action to an egalitarian playing field? What does it mean to have a feminist lens? Quite simply it means to look at the world from a woman's perspective honoring the common experiences and histories of women in the society. It does not mean excluding men or devaluing their contributions. Feminism is not a four-letter word. In other words, any research that uses a feminist lens is research that is informed on the current and former status of women in society. For example, doing feminist research on the workday of the average American woman who works outside of the home would require more than a survey of their activities or interviews with women about their goals and dreams. A feminist analysis would include in depth and comparative analysis of the current circumstances of women, and also examine such issues at the societal and historical levels.

There are many feminisms, including liberal, radical, psychoanalytic, Marxist, socialist, black feminist thought and other standpoint feminisms , multicultural, standpoint feminisms, and postmodern and poststructural feminism, to name some of the more typical demarcation lines, and all focus in some way on working to change the status and opportunities for women both in this country and all over the world (Nicholson, 1997; Tong, 1998). There is considerable overlap among these feminisms, but for our purposes here, these can broadly be conceptualized into individually focused feminist theories, structural and standpoint feminisms, and poststrucutral and postmodern feminisms.

Feminist Theories with an Individualistic Focus

Both liberal feminism and psychoanalytic feminism tend to have more of a focus on women as individuals, though liberal feminism deals with women collectively as a group. Liberal feminism has primarily been concerned with helping women gain access to the institutions and systems of privilege that men have always had access to, and on giving women as *individuals* equal rights and privileges to men. The focus is on equal opportunity for women in the current system the way that it is, particularly in regard to education and job opportunity. Essentially there is not a broad systemic critique of the structures of society in liberal feminism, but rather more of a focus on the rights of women as individuals, and helping women fit into the education or employment system the way that is. Liberal feminists seek only moderate changes to existing structures, and focus more on how the individual rights of women can be better protected in the workplace and in society in general. Psychoanalytic feminism tends to also have an individualistic focus but from a psychological perspective, and the fact that the system reproduces itself because gender socialization happens through both conscious but largely unconscious mechanisms (Chodorow, 1978). Thus, psychoanalytic feminists tend to try to deal with the roots of patriarchy (the domination of women by men) in people's unconscious, arguing that women (or men) cannot change unless they deal with the patriarchy in their unconscious. But the unit of analysis in these feminisms is the individual, and the individual rights of women as a group.

Structural and Standpoint Feminist Theories

Structural feminist theories, tend to focus more on the direct challenge of social structures that affect women's development and access to education and for paid work in the public workplace. The concern of radical feminism has been primarily with patriarchy as a form of structural oppression. Marxist and socialist feminists have challenged the notion of what counts as work and emphasize the fact that capitalism has relied on the unpaid and low pay work of women and subsistence laborers worldwide, and focus on ways the system can be challenged to

provide greater access to the world's resources. Similarly, standpoint feminisms are also structural feminist theories and focus on the needs of particular groups of women based on where they "stand" relative to the margins and centers of different cultures. Thus black feminist thought focuses more specifically of the needs of Black women (Hill Collins, 1998) from their perspective, and focus on challenging racism and patriarchy in the workplace and in society; lesbian feminists focus on the life experiences of lesbians, and challenging heterosexism and homophobia as structural systems. The units of analysis here are the social structures (race, gender, sexual orientation as social structures) that affect women's development.

Poststructural/Postmodern Feminist Theories

Poststructural and postmodern feminist theories build on the structural and standpoint feminist theories in that they focus on challenging power relations that are based on the social structures of race, gender, class, sexual orientation. But the unit of analysis is on *the connections between* the individual and these social structures, and how these social structures affect how individuals constructs knowledge and identity, as well as how structures affect access to the public workplace and education. Poststructural feminisms also emphasize the notion of constantly shifting identity, in light of the ways individuals and social groups both challenge and resist power relations based on social structures, and the ways they also unconsciously reproduce aspects of privilege and oppression based on race, gender, class, sexual orientation. In terms of the workplace, poststructuralists would examine WHO determines what counts as valuable workplace knowledge and the way to build on the ways of building and valuing knowledge and collaborative knowledge within and across race, gender, class lines.

Feminist Research

There are many types of feminism and just as many types of feminist research. Feminist research attempts to conduct examinations with a theoretical lens that is cognizant of the structural inequalities that frame the lives of women. A major tenet said to drive feminist research is the obligation to deliver "a critique of traditional concepts and structures that have marginalized women materially and psychologically, in the world and even in their souls" (Patai, 1991, p. 139). While the common ground of living in an androcentric world unties all women under the banner of gender oppression, denying the structural inequalities that privilege some over others serves to reproduce and reflect the hegemonic dragon we, as feminists, are trying to slay. Therefore, feminist research has tended to be ever mindful of issues of race, class, and sexual orientation.

Although feminist scholars in the sciences have made major contributions, such as medical profiling, and have also re-interpreted and developed theories that have been normed on female participants, most feminist research has been centered in the realm of the qualitative paradigm. Invariably, the responsibility, often internally imposed, falls on feminists to accurately and sensitively include, represent, and portray women. There is a weighty awareness that the lives of women are usually invisible and in most academic arenas ensconced in stereotype. Feminist scholars have attempted to free women subjects and participants from the banner of the "Other."

The concept of the "Other" in feminist research is principally based on Simone deBeauvoir's concept of the female as other to man's primary being (1968). In extrapolation, the term has come to mean the "different" when compared to the "norm." Other commonly dichotomized pairings occurring in the literature and in research are black/white, gay/straight, women of color/white women. In general, feminist researchers attempt to present the other, the woman, in ways that give power and voice to the "studied." Feminist researchers are therefore attempting to provide a critical and insightful corrective force to the stereotypical ideas implanted by the patriarchal and hegemonic weight of Western culture.

Such research goals are often problematized by the positionality of the researcher in relation to the positionality of the group members being studied, particularly when women are studying other women, whether they share similar or divergent backgrounds. Simply put, it matters whether the researcher stands as an outsider or an insider to the participant or group. In final analysis, reconciling power and positional statuses seems impossible. However, feminist researchers try to remain mindful that the powerful forces that structure our world exist in major systems that give essence to the hierarchy: the government, social organizations, communities, and family units. People are educated formally and informally in how to order the world based on their group fidelities or positions. Often we learn who to think about and how to behave towards others through what we read.

How do we as researchers who are also feminists change the fundamental ways in which we explore and in turn represent the world? How do we see and then represent the lives of those who are like and different from us? We are left asking these cyclical questions with responses that only spawn new questions. The research literature poses such questions but fails to answer them, leaving open the assumption that merely contemplating transformation is

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sufficient and honorable. But neglecting to ask such questions is unconscionable, given the on-going dialogue that occurs in feminist scholarship between positionality and power. Merely discussing these problems, however, is insufficient, and the consistent re-examination of one's positionality, motives, and perspective become an essential task for the feminist researcher. Thus the feminist researcher carries certain competing inquiries into the each examination and attempts to balance voices, political agendas, and the societal hierarchies enveloping the process.

Feminist Research in HRD

Fundamentally, the purpose of feminist research is to conduct research *for women* rather than *about women* (Coyner, 1988-1989, p. 291). In other words, feminist researchers would likely be less interested in studying the paucity of women executives, than in unveiling learning strategies for all women that could help them disrupt oppressive patriarchal systems.

Feminist Research Themes

The first section of this paper offered definitions of feminism and feminist research. This section turns the research eye toward HRD itself and analyzes how the process might become more feminist, and in turn, more inclusive.

Worell and Etaugh (1994) synthesized feminist theory and research in psychology and other disciplines to identify six themes of research they regarded as feminist. Bierema and Cseh (2000) modified Worrell and Etaugh's 1996 categories to be more relevant to HRD research contexts. Each of these categories will be briefly defined. The first, "Challenges Traditional Scientific Inquiry" means that the researcher rejects the assumption of a truly objective science that is free from culture, history, or experience of the observer, and partners with the participants to ensure that they do not get manipulated in the research process. The second component, "Challenges the Category of 'Women'" strives to affirm women's strengths, resilience, and competence. This can be accomplished in HRD through discovering women's contributions to HRD research and history and by valuing women as a legitimate target of study rather than the "other" or deficient one. This aspect also discards the traditional notion of comparing women to a male norm and acknowledges that the category of "woman" is versatile and that there is no one such category that can possibly represent all women. The third category "Considers Asymmetrical Power Relationships" seeks empowerment of all girls and women. It distinguishes women's subordinate status in society as based on unequal power distribution instead of deficiencies and explores the influence of power on women's lives. This category considers differences among women as mediated by power differentials related to opportunities available based on color, social economic status, age, sexual orientation, etc., and studies interpersonal relationships within the context of patriarchal power arrangements. The fourth category "Recognizes Gender as an Essential Category of Analysis" identifies multiple conceptions of gender and diversity. This perspective also challenges the use of gender only as an independent variable that explains observed behavior. The fifth category "Attends to Language and the Power to 'Name'" by creating public awareness of hidden or unspoken phenomena such as sexual harassment, heterosexism, language rendering women invisible, or the private lives of women. The invisibility of these issues in both research and practice only serves to reinforce inequitable systems of power. The sixth and final category "Advocates Social Activism and Social Change" charges researchers to reconceptualize theories, methods, and goals to promote possible social change, reduce power asymmetries, and support gender justice. This aspect is also critical of how research knowledge is depicted and acknowledges that sometimes it oppresses rather than benefits women such as portraying them as diseased, deficient, or other.

The Process of Feminist Research in HRD

Now we turn to the process or "nuts and bolts" of conducting feminist research and address methodological issues. Eichler asks, "is there a feminist methodology?" and retorts, "it depends" (1999, p. 9). This section addresses feminist processes of formulating questions, designing research, identifying sample populations, and analyzing data.

Question Formulation. Research questions have traditionally been conceptualized without consideration of women (Fine, 1985; Lykes & Stewart, 1986; Unger, 1983). A quick reading of HRD research reveals an agenda driven by management interests focused primarily on learning and performance (Bierema & Cseh, 2000). Learning and performance are vitally important to HRD research, however, research question formulation often overlooks the impact of power, oppression, and organizational relationships on learning and performance. Asking new questions

is an important role in critiquing existent HRD research and in creating future studies (McHugh, Koeske, and Frieze, 1986). HRD researchers could benefit by asking questions about their questions such as, "How do we integrate multiple voices into HRD research?" "Who benefits from HRD research?" "How does research reproduce systems of oppression versus challenge them?" "What impact do omissions in research have on HRD theory and practice?"

Research Design. A wide variety of research designs is used in HRD, and there appears to be a balance in methodology between qualitative and quantitative approaches (Bierema & Cseh, 2000, 2002). Feminist research proposes expanding the methods and voices of knowledge creation. DeVault (1996) implores researchers to avoid favoring one philosophical research stance over the other and suggests that "feminists have made major contributions by finding concepts and practices that resist 'dualisms' and they urge resistance to the qualitative-quantitative division" (p. 31). Quoting Cannon, Higginbotham, and Laung, she points out that small scale projects may be more likely than quantitative studies to reproduce race and class biases of the discipline by including participants who are readily accessible to the researchers. She also advocates that "quantitative feminist work involves correcting gender and other cultural biases in standard procedure" (p. 31). Quantitative methods are customarily used in HRD research and researchers would improve knowledge about race and gender by heeding DeVault's advice. Qualitative research is also widely applied in HRD research, however, very few authors acknowledge their role as the researcher or are forthcoming about their biases.

Sample Populations. As in question formulation, HRD research is biased in sample selection. There tends to be an executive and managerial focus. As the hierarchical level increases, the population of women decreases. Thus, by virtue of selecting executive and managerial populations to study, women are excluded. This phenomenon is not surprising since executive and managerial groups posses organizational power, control resources, and stand to benefit from research. Women are absent in problem formulation, research design, data analysis and future implications (Bierema, 1997; Bierema & Cseh, 2000). Biased selection such as this serves to exclude women, minorities and employee groups with less power in organizations. It also prevents HRD researchers and practitioners from gaining a full understanding of the organizational context.

Data Analysis. Although HRD research populations regularly include women and minorities, data analysis often fails to address gender or oppressed status as an important unit of investigation. Further, the social and political contexts are often controlled or ignored in traditional research. Failure to capture richness, context, and multiple perspectives in analysis is another feminist criticism of social science research. The challenge for HRD researchers is to more comprehensively analyze data. This will promote learning about women, oppressed groups, and social context. HRD researchers also need to take their conclusions a step further when considering findings. How do the findings impact women and other oppressed groups? What are the implications for organizational or social change?

Contradictions and Challenges Related to Women in HRD Practice

There are many issues that confront feminists who practice HRD such as reconciling a feminist framework and values with masculine, patriarchal organizational culture. One of the ironies of the HRD field is that although management continues to be a profession for men, human resource workers tend to be women (Hughes, 2000; Ross, 1996: Townley, 1994). Further, although human resources workers tend to be women, often those with the most power in the field are men, and as a whole, the profession enjoys little organizational power with respect to other functions. Finally, it should not be assumed that women in HRD are automatically feminist, or concerned with women's issues, nor should men be excluded from the process. Indeed, men can both be feminists and engage in feminist research. Sadly, however, human resources practices sometimes function to perpetuate patriarchal systems of power.

A poignant example of the contradictions and challenges related to women in HRD practice is the case of lesbians in work context. A critical examination of the unique double-minority status of lesbians in the organizational setting easily establishes for the HRD practitioner to appreciate an obvious gap between the philosophical underpinning of HRD theory—which espouses learning, change, performance, and constant improvement for the lives and careers of all–and the status of lesbians in the organizational setting. Heterosexism is a worldview (McNaught, 1993, p. 48) and for most people, it is probably not even conscious. It is a mind-set based upon limited opportunity to experience diversity (McNaught, 1993). Heterosexism is not always a simple, benign, innocent posture. Rather, heterosexism is the belief that heterosexuality is actually *superior* to homosexuality and should be an enforceable social norm (Badgett, 1995). Lesbians, because they experience a double minority status in the world, are subject to even greater discrimination based on the intersection of gender and sexual orientation

(Fassinger, 1996). We must ask ourselves how HRD research affects women's ability to gain power and influence in both practice and research, and consider what we are willing to do to begin eroding the inequitable structures of research and practice. The feminist perspective is change-oriented, seeking to equalize power relations that often lead to oppression of various groups in society.

The feminist approach offers HRD, as a relatively new field, the opportunity to apply multiple, socially responsible approaches to increasing the knowledge base. The status of lesbians today in the corporate setting is not necessarily identical to what it was for heterosexual women, say, twenty years ago, but it is analogous and comparative. Invisibility and powerlessness are thematic consistencies amongst both populations and any kind of practice of empowering and integrating lesbians, who face the dual hurdle of gender and sexual orientation oppression, does not exist in HRD. Issues of lesbian representation, like other lesbian issues, have rarely addressed in scholarly literature as valid questions in their own right, to the great detriment of lesbian studies. As soon as the lesbian is lumped in—for better or for worse—with her male homosexual counterpart, the singularity of her experience tends to become obscured (Castle 1993, p. 12). Feminist practice offers a solution to the problem of lesbian powerlessness and invisibility in the corporate setting because of its predilection to not just identify and acknowledge assumptions about the way the world is, but to create space and conversation about how those assumptions (such as sexism and heterosexism) can and should be uprooted.

Although barely acknowledged, corporate cultures are bastions of heterosexism. Such work environments create unique challenges for lesbians and aptly illustrate some of the contradictions for feminists involved in HRD. Assimilating oneself into the ubiquitous heterosexual corporate culture, networking, and socializing within the organization are vital aspects of negotiating a corporate career. Sometimes, the strategies that gays use to fit into the heterosexist corporate environment handicap them, because those strategies often result in a gay person's being perceived to be aloof (Digh, 1999). Lesbians in particular face the conflict of integrating with the heterosexual community: Being a part of activities and making contacts important for career development, but being viewed as different from heterosexuals (Boatwright et al, 1996, p. 224). Thus, lesbians who work in corporate America walk a fine line in the corporate setting because of their double challenge. Gay women are slower than gay men, for example, to make their sexuality known because they differ not in one but in two important ways from straight male executives, who still tend to surround themselves with similar colleagues at the very top of the ladder (Swisher, 1996). Lesbians, therefore, working in corporate America constantly negotiate the multiplicity of variables (sexism, heterosexism, networking opportunities, and "fit" within the corporate culture) that can potentially detonate their careers. This negotiation process is arguably no different than the general experience of lesbian life in the larger society.

Lesbians represent arguably a perfect population for which to practice true HRD interventions based on feminist theory and practice because feminist theory and practice provide opportunity and even perhaps a requirement for the organization to embrace the "new knowledge" of which Larson & Freeman (1997) and Oakley (2000) refer, which result not only from their invisibility but also because of the power structure that their presence challenges. Lesbians differ not in just one, but in two ways from their straight male counterparts, which can doubly foil their chances of career ascent in an organizational setting. Nevertheless, lesbians present not just a significant problem by which feminist theory and practice can manifest in HRD intervention, but also they present significant opportunities because they unravel some of the very social constructions of knowledge in which they exist. For example, Fassinger (1995) has pointed out that, despite a number of vocational barriers that lesbian may face, there are also important facilitative aspects of lesbian identity related to career planning and choice. Most salient among these is that lesbians tend to demonstrate more nontraditional, androgynous gender roles than do heterosexual women (Browning, Reynolds, & Dworkin, 1991; Fassinger, 1996; Garnets & Kimmle, 1991, Hetherington & Orzek, 1989; Morgan & Brown, 1991).

Conclusion

The process of feminist research is similar to other approaches to research. It is distinct, however, in that it formulates questions that have the potential to create knowledge for and with women that improves their lives and status. Feminist research is designed with the understanding that it is a subjective process, impacted by both the positionality of the researcher and the researched. Feminist research embraces a wide range of research designs and traditions and is more concerned with the ability of research to contribute to lessening women's oppression than the particular method selected. Populations are selected to truly represent women, not just white, middle class women, but diverse women on the basis of race, age, sexual orientation, and social class. Data are analyzed to include women. Woman as a category is an important unit of investigation that is not just counted, but analyzed. Finally, the process of feminist research acknowledges the relationship between the researcher and the researched

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This paper, made the case for feminist research in HRD, defined feminist research, described feminist research strategies in HRD and spoke to the challenges and contradictions inherent in a feminist HRD practice. HRD is an important and emerging field with a rich tradition of research. As researchers, we have a constant responsibility to critically evaluate our questions, methods, and findings. Practitioners have a responsibility to demand research that us useful in addressing the difficulties presented by work contexts plagued with racism, sexism, heterosexism and classism. All of us have an additional accountability to assess HRD research's impact on performance, learning, employee well-being, and social welfare. Is HRD research increasing opportunities for women and minorities in organizations, or is it decreasing them? Is the work of HRD impacting the environment in a positive fashion, or is it contributing to our worsening environmental and global crisis? Whose voice is being heard in the scholarly discourse? Are they predominantly white male? The point of this paper is not to ask the field to shift entirely to a feminist framework, but rather to make space for it. As the field of HRD emerges we have the opportunity to draw the picture that includes a variety of approaches, including feminist research. It is our hope that HRD researchers will make space for it.

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College of Technology
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, OH 43403-0301

Telephone: 419.372.9155

FAX: 419.372.8385

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